

'Who's left?'

By Sam Farr, Member of Congress

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The White House must be a lonely place to work these days.

In the past nine months, we've seen the exit of Donald Rumsfeld, Harriet Miers, Karl Rove, Tony Snow, Alberto Gonzales and a host of supporting characters. Granted, turnover in a lame duck administration is typical, but this mass exodus is conspicuous for its depth.

The latest departure, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, paints a vivid picture, both for the actions he directed and for the length it took for him to leave.

First, a few of the scandals that Gonzales found himself in the middle of:

- As White House Counsel, he wrote a memo arguing the Geneva Conventions are "quaint" and that rules against torture don't necessarily apply to all prisoners.
- As attorney general, he presided over the controversial warrantless wiretapping program run by the National Security Agency.
- Most recently, he was implicated in the politically influenced firing of several U.S. attorneys, which led to multiple Congressional hearings.

And for all of these actions, he earned the unwavering support of the president. This leads to another situation we've seen all too often in this administration: Texas coattails.

Rove, Gonzales and Miers were all part of Bush's Texas posse, tagging along on his trip to Washington. Unfortunately, competency wasn't always a necessary component of membership.

Gonzales was clearly out of his depth as attorney general, and Washington nearly choked when Bush nominated longtime personal lawyer Miers to the Supreme Court. That nomination was quickly recalled.

Gonzales has to get credit for doing a stellar job staving off calls for his resignation. Republicans and Democrats alike were ready to see him go in the spring, but the president refused to dismiss him.

Now that Gonzales is gone, it's my hope that Bush will nominate an attorney general who will faithfully serve as an objective guardian of our laws. This is yet another opportunity for the president to surround himself with wise advisers, a chance to reassure the public that the White House exists to benefit all Americans.

I continue to hope that he will take these chances and run with them, while there's still time left in his presidency.